

**Amendments to the Claims**

1. (Currently amended) An article joining control method for joining articles conveyed and stored in a plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths for storing therein a plurality of articles, from said plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths to a main conveyance path conveying articles, in which when a spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is detected between articles or between groups of articles being conveyed on the main conveyance path, the stored articles corresponding to the length of the spacing are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance paths to the main conveyance path, characterized in that:

when it is confirmed that articles are stored at a position in close proximity to a junction with the main conveyance path and a time-up period lapses, each auxiliary conveyance path reserves a detected spacing in the main conveyance path, subsequently when this reserved spacing approaches the junction, the articles corresponding to the spacing in size are cut out from one of the auxiliary conveyance ~~path for joining paths and joined to the spacing, and when the articles have been cut out, carrying and storing articles into and in the auxiliary conveyance path is stopped for a given time~~; and

~~when it is impossible to cut out all the articles stored in this auxiliary conveyance path to the reserved spacing, another spacing is reserved in the main conveyance path for cutting out of the articles remaining in this auxiliary path, with priority over other auxiliary paths.~~

when it is impossible to cut out all of the articles stored in said one auxiliary conveyance path to the reserved spacing, said one auxiliary conveyance path cancels a spacing reserved by another of the auxiliary conveyance paths on an upstream side of

said one auxiliary conveyance path, and reserves for said one auxiliary conveyance path the canceled spacing in the main conveyance path.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Original) An article joining control method as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that:

the spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is a spacing equal to a spacing preset between the groups of articles in a before-and-behind relation plus a minimum length of the stored article.

6. (New) An article joining control method as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that:

when the articles have been cut out from said one auxiliary conveyance path and joined to the main conveyance path, carrying and storing articles into and in said one auxiliary conveyance path is stopped for a given time.

7. (New) An article joining control method for joining articles conveyed and stored in a plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths for storing therein a plurality of articles, from said plurality of auxiliary conveyance paths to a main conveyance path conveying articles, in which when a spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is detected between articles or between groups of articles being conveyed on the main conveyance path, the stored articles corresponding to the length of the

spacing are cut out from the auxiliary conveyance paths to the main conveyance path, characterized in that:

when it is confirmed that articles are stored at a position in close proximity to a junction with the main conveyance path and a time-up period lapses, each auxiliary conveyance path reserves a detected spacing in the main conveyance path, subsequently when this reserved spacing approaches the junction, the articles corresponding to the spacing in size are cut out from one of the auxiliary conveyance paths and joined to the spacing; and

when it is impossible to cut out all of the articles stored in said one auxiliary conveyance path to the reserved spacing, said one auxiliary conveyance path immediately reserves a detected spacing in the main conveyance path without necessitating the time-up period upon confirming that articles are stored at the position in close proximity to the junction with the main conveyance path.

8. (New) An article joining control method as set forth in claim 7, characterized in that:

the spacing equal to or greater than a predetermined length is a spacing equal to a spacing preset between the groups of articles in a before-and-behind relation plus a minimum length of the stored article.

9. (New) An article joining control method as set forth in claim 7, characterized in that:

when the articles have been cut from said one auxiliary conveyance path and joined to the main conveyance path, carrying and storing articles into and in said one auxiliary conveyance path is stopped for a given time.